CRITIC'S CHOICE FILE

LOOKS AT THE

X-MEN™

CRITIC'S CHOICE FILE LOOKS AT THE X-MEN

EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

DEDICATED TO MUTANT LOVE

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GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1 (1975)

"Second Genesis"
Writers: Chrise Claremont (uncredited) & Len Wein
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Len Wein

In Winzeldorf, Germany, an inhuman looking being named Kurt Wagner is being hounded by the townspeople. Finally in frustration, like an animal at bay, Kurt turns and attacks his tormentors. Just as they are bearing him down by weight of numbers, they freeze as though entranced. There at the edge of the crowd is Charles Xavier. He explains that he has a school for gifted youngsters such as himself and Kurt agrees to accompany him.

In Quebec, Canada, Xavier turns up again, this time as a guest of the Canadian government. There he is introduced to Wolverine and offers him a chance to be a free agent. He accepts, much to the anger of his commander, but as Wolverine so pointedly points out, he chose to resign his commission.

In Nashville, Tennessee, Xavier seeks out The Banshee (first seen as an adversary in issue #28) and invites him to join his team. Banshee accepts. "'Twill be nice to tread the straight an' narrow...fer a change."

In Kenya, East Africa, Xavier encounters Storm, a young Black woman who has been like a god to her people due to the weather control powers she possesses. Xavier offers her a chance to be a part of the real world, with all of its challenges. She accepts.

In Osaka, Japan, Prof. X asks the help of Shiro Yoshida, otherwise known as Sunfire. He agrees to help.

It is in Lake Baikal, Siberia, where Xavier finds Peter Rasputin and offers to teach him how to use his mutant powers. He regrets having to leave his family but decides that it is for the best.

In Arizona, Xavier finds John Proudstar, an Indian with mutant powers of a powerful order. Although not interested in helping any white man, he finally agrees rather than be thought a coward.

Back at his school in Westchester, Xavier has assembled his new students to learn why he has sought them out. Scott Summers, known as Cyclops, explains that they have been gathered because the X-Men disappeared. Cyclops and the other X-Men (including Havoc and Polaris) had flown to an island where the Cerebro mechanism had detected a mutant so powerful as to defy classification. When they arrived they were attacked. The next thing Scott knew was that he was back aboard the strato-jet on its way back to New York. Its controls jammed on autopilot. What's more, Scott's power had been drained and his costume was in tatters. But how did he escape, and from what? He doesn't know. But after returning to New York

and telling Xavier what happened, Scott's powers miraculously returned.

So the mission is for the new team to return to the island, to learn what attacked the first group and learn whether they're alive or dead.

The X-Men split up as they reach the island and fan out in teams of two. They are attacked by rocks and strange plants, even by giant crabs, but finally find their way to a huge temple. Inside are the other X-Men, tendrils attached to their bodies as though something were feeding on them. Not on them, precisely, but on their powers. They free them and get outside the temple walls where the island itself begins to attack them for it is the island that is the mutant! It sent Scott back so that more powerful beings would be brought back for it to feed on.

With Prof. X's help, a concerted attack is launched against the island creature. Through the powers of Polaris and Storm, gravity ceases to exist around the island and it is hurtled into space while the X-Men flee on a raft created by Iceman. They weather a storm and when it passes they find the airtight stratojet floating in the ocean so that they can get home. On the way home, they wonder what is going to happen with 13 X-Men on active duty?

* * * * * * * * *

The introduction and some basic backgrounds on the new X-Men. Sunfire would leave in issue 94 or so. We don't learn any more about him then and Thunderbird dies in issue 95 so his personality isn't very well developed either. But the new group is certainly different and exciting.

The story is certainly different and exciting, particularly the scene of the X-Men hung up while the mutant island feeds off of them. That's more like something out of a horror story and is a very effective scene. An awful lot happens in these 36 pages and it could have stood some expansion since so many of the events are so pivotal, but the story is tight and it moves fast. The bickering by characters like Thunderbird seems a bit familiar, but these are things which would be worked out as Claremont smoothed out the rough edges of the characters and the concept.

X-Men #94 (August 1975)
"The Doomsmith Scenario!"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Bob McCleod
Colorist: Phil Rachelson

The X-Men are all assembled before Prof. X following the successful battle against Krakoa, the living island. But just as the professor is expressing pride over how the X-Men (both old and new) performed, Sunfire, who had been recruited as one of the new X-Men, announces that he's leaving, that he never agreed to join them, only to help them, and that his first duty is to Japan. "Then Sunfire bids you farewell, Professor; you and your pack of idealistic fools."

The rest of the X-Men decide amongst themselves who is staying and who is moving on and decisions are made very neatly almost exclusively between the new remaining and the old leaving, moving on to their own lives. As Jean Grey puts it, "You helped us grow up...and that's just it. We've grown up. We're not children any more, Professor. We have to live our own lives now." Wolverine doesn't care what their reasons are for leaving; he figures that if they want to leave, they should just get out. Cyclops breaks up a fight between Wolverine and Iceman, whereupon Havoc (Scott's brother, Alex) asks him what his plans are. Scott doesn't know, yet.

The next morning he reveals that he's remaining. Jean is surprised because she does love him. "I'm an X-Man, pur and simple. This is my home, my life. This is when I...belong." He also doesn't feel he can move freely amon normal people when his eye beams are such a deadly ar easily released threat. So he remains behind.

Scott steps right in to the roli of team leader, introducin the new X-Men to the danger room so that they can sharpe their skills and give them an extra edge.

Their skills are challenged when Norad is taken over ar held for ransom by Count Nefaria, who battled the old X Men back in isues 22 & 23. Using a time-space portal an his team of Ani-Men, Nefaria demands a ransom from eac nation on earth, or else he'll launch America's nuclea arsenal. When The Avengers are unavailable to respond t the threat, The Beast (who was then in The Avengers contacts Professor X and seeks his aid.

The X-Men fly out to Colorado and when Nefari recognizes their aircraft, he shoots it down. This chapte ends with the X-Men falling helplessly through the air.

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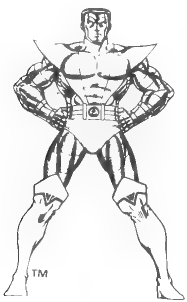


While **Giant Size X-Men** #1 introduces the new X-Men, this story establishes who the core team will actually consist of, which is Cyclops, Nightcrawler, Colossus, Wolverine, Storm, Thunderbird and Banshee.

The shock expressed by Prof. X when the original X-Men choose to leave him is understandable. After all, he just scoured the world to find mutants who would assist in rescuing the X-Men when they were taken prisoner by the alien island. He couldn't help but feel that the clan was being a tad ungracious. The farewell scene between Scott Summers and Jean Grey is quite touching and much more interesting than the days of the old X-Men when for many issues they just thought about how much they liked each other without ever saying anything.

Thunderbird emerges as a character quite similar in personality to Wolverine in that he's quick to pick a fight. In Thunderbird's case, though, this seems to be beligerance to disguise a low self-image. With Wolverine, it's extreme self-confidence. But superficially they seem quite similar. This may explain more than anything else why Thunderbird was disposed of in issue 95, beyond the obvious drama inherent in an X-Man dying on one of his first missions.

The personalities of the new characters are dealt with more directly here than in **Giant Size** #1 and we can see more clearly who the new X-Men really are and see why the old X-Men wouldn't have gotten along with them due to personality conflicts. Storm and Colossus are more passive characters here, dealing with things in a more reserved, non-judgemental manner. For this reason we can't read their personalities as quickly as we can Thunderbird and Wolverine. Cyclops, the sole holdout from the old X-Men is the character most deeply explored in this issue because he's the only one of the new X-Men who has any relationships that we know about yet, even if this one is with a departing member of the team.

This is a strong issue although the character scenes could have stood being fleshed out even more as the Count Nefaria and the Ani-Men plotline seems like pretty standard stuff following the breakup of the old team and the real formation of the new one. But what would a comic book be without a villain?

"Warhunt!"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Plotter: Len Wein
Inker: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Petra Goldberg
Editor: Marv Wolfman

The X-Men are falling helplessly through the air. Storm and Banshee grab some of those who can't fly and carry them down to the ground, although Colossus is not one of those who gets a lift. He hits the ground with a powerful impact, but easily survives. Banshee has to come back for Cyclops and rescues him with just a few seconds to spare.

After they're regrouped, Nightcrawler teleports inside the base to find a door he can open for the others. He's quickly attacked by one of the Ani-Men but easily defeats him. But when he's activating the hillside door, the Ani-Man slips away.

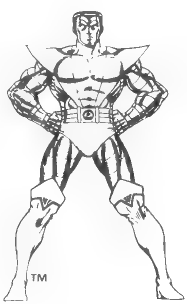
Inside the complex, the X-Men are accosted by gas and by mentally dominated soldiers and then finally the Ani-Men themselves. Dragonfly attempts to dominate Cyclops' mind and succeeds, but it only causes his visor to open and blast her.

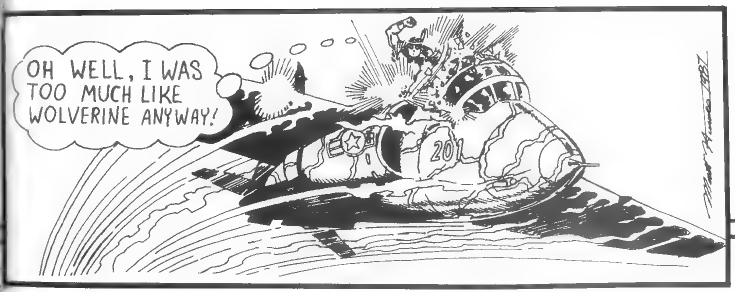
Banshee and Thunderbird come upon Count Nefaria as he is starting to make his escape aboard a Harrier jet. The Doomsmith system has been activated and Nefaria is sure that the X-Men's attack has been fruitless. But as Nefaria's jet takes off, Thunderbird leaps aboard and begins pounding on the cockpit. Banshee yells at him to get off because he could stop the jet with a sonic scream. Even Xavier mentally contacts John Proudstar and commands him to leap from the jet before it's too late. Thunderbird refuses. He intends to prove that he's a warrior of the Apache.

The rest of the X-Men emerge from the hanger and see the distant jet, just as it explodes. Xavier is still in mental contact with Thunderbird and that contact continues right up through John Proudstar's moment of death in the flaming wreckage.

"The scenario ends now, as it began, with the breaking of Charles Xavier's heart — and the twisting of his soul. For, in the end, he could not desert his pupil — and all John Proudstar felt, Charles Xavier felt as well, with one difference...Charles Xavier is still alive."

Scott puts up a proud front, explaining that Banshee did all that he could. It wasn't his fault. "I suppose it had to happen sometime. Hell, sooner or later it happens to all of us," Scott explains, "in this business. It comes with the uniform."





The first actual death of an X-Man. The fact that this was only Thunderbird's third appearance tended to diminish the impact somewhat. When Jean Grey died in issue #137, she had been around since **X-Men #1**. But as it turned out, no one ever really dies in comics if someone else can come up with a convincing reason to get around it. So Jean Grey was never Phoenix and thus never died. John Proudstar hasn't been the beneficiary of any revisionist history yet. When it seemed that he was, it just turned out to be his brother. In Chris Claremont's artistic universe, when he kills them, they stay dead (if he has anything to say about it).

Thunderbird was an awful lot in personality like Wolverine. He didn't like taking orders and tended to rub people the wrong way. With Wolverine around you don't really notice Thunderbird's absence because he fills in any void that might have been left by the character's brash argumentativeness. Thunderbird was always spoiling for a fight and trying to prove something. Wolverine acts like he has a chip on his shoulder that's bigger than his feet and he's quick to prove to a team mate who's really the stronger. It's because Thunderbird never really developed as an individual that his absence was only missed by those fans who regretted that one of the rare American Indian characters in comic books was quickly killed off.

X-Men #96 — "Night of the Demon!"

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Phil Rachelson
Editor: Marv Wolfman
Plot Assist: Bill Mantlo

In the wake of the death of Thunderbird in the fiery crash of Count Nefaria's aircraft, Cyclops is torn over trying to justify the cost of one man's life against their successfully saving the world from a nuclear holocaust. In his anguish he temporarily loses control and begins blasting everything around him in the wooded area near the mansion headquarters of the X-Men. Before he calms down and realizes what he's doing, Cyclops smashes trees as well as a strange, ancient monument which was obscured by the overgrowth. As the crestfallen X-Man walks away, a strange halo of energy appears around the damaged obelisk, but Cyclops doesn't notice it...yet!

In the Danger Room, the X-Men are practicing and Colussus accidentally hits Wolverine full force. Wolverine responds by gleefully trying to go after Colossus with admantium claws fully in play. Storm and Nightcrawler have to interfere to head him off a tragic conflict.

Xavier reveals to Banshee that he is planning a trip and that one Moira MacTaggert will be arriving to act as housekeeper in the Prof's absence. Much to Banshee's surprise, she turns out to be a young, attractive woman.

At Project Armageddon in the Adirondack mountains, we meet Dr. Lang, who is in the final stages of completing a project which has been in the works for six years. When Col. Michael Rossi arrives to inspect the situation to give final approval or recommend shutting it down, he finds that Lang is obsessed with the project's goal, that of capturing and studying mutants—beings he considers a threat to all mankind. When Lang realizes that Rossi is not supportive of his goals, he plots the Colonel's destruction.

Back at X-Mansion, the team is meeting Moira MacTaggert when they experience some destruction of their own, namely Cyclops being hurled through a window! He gasps out that something is following him close behind, whereupon an inhuman creature bursts through the wall. This is Kierrok, the Shatterer of Souls. He is after Cyclops, who somehow awakened the creature before its time. The X-Men battle the creature, but whenever it is destroyed, it reforms, while the team seems weaker.

Prof. X mindprobes the thing and learns enough to send Storm out to the cairn from which it sprang. Storm is attacked by demons and pulled into the monument, but

She bursts free, destroying the cairn and Kierrok as well.

Back at the plane of Col. Rossi, we find that it has crashed, killing all those aboard.

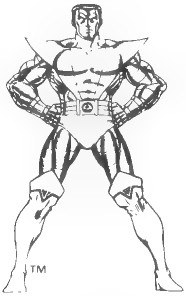
* * * * *

This is a plot common to comics in that a monster appears out of nowhere, and the heroes fight it and it disappears. It provides the necessary dose of action but the real drama involves the story being set up for a couple issues down the line involving Dr. Lang and the return of the Sentinels.

Wolverine displays more dangerous aggression in that when he gets angry it seems that he doesn't care who gets hurt in reprisal. His personality will be deepened over the coming months so that he doesn't seem quite so much like a mindless, homicidal maniac, which is what he seems to be shaping up into at this point.

The introduction of Moira MacTaggert (who will figure prominently in stories still quite far down the line) is interesting as we know nothing about her beyond the fact that Prof. X trusts her implicitly. And when the demon attacks, she responds by defending home and hearth with a sub-machinegun! Not your average housekeeper.

The monster seems to be inspired by the works of H.P. Lovecraft, but not in obvious ways so much as just thematically. Dave Cockrum does some very good artwork, although when the demon returns about four years later, the interpretation by John Byrne will be quite a bit different.



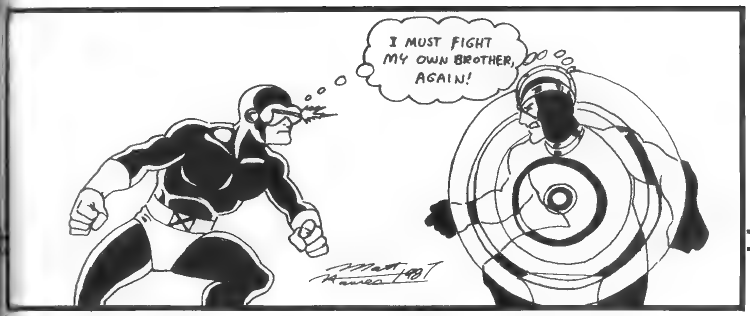
X-Men #97 (Feb. '76)
"My Brother, My Enemy"

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Don Warfield
Editor: Marv Wolfman

Xavier dreams, images of fantastic vessels blasting each other with incredible weapons until only one small scout craft escapes. As it draws closer, Xavier can almost see the face of its occupant. He awakens with a shout and at breakfast he confesses to Moira MacTaggert that he feels that his mind is no longer his own and that he fears he's going mad. But Xavier will not discuss this with Scott or any of the X-Men until he understands it himself. In order to sort things out Xavier is going to take a vacation and leave Moira in charge of things while Scott remains in charge of the X-Men themselves.

In Rio Diablo Lorna Dane (Polaris) and Alex Summers (Havoc) have been living in a shack and working on their doctorates in the Rio Diablo mountain range. One morning when Alex goes off to work alone, Lorna is left in the hut. When she hears a knock at the door she wonders who it could be since there's no other people for miles around. Upon answering the door she is thrust down by a blast of power. A mysterious shadow falls across her body. But Alex hears her scream and rushes back to the house, only to be struck down by Lorna herself.

At Kennedy International Airport three days later, Xavi is preparing to board his plane and is being seen off most of the X-Men. To everyone's surprise, Havoc an Lorna walk into the airport in full costume and when Je detects a trap, Lorna strikes her down. They then cha after the Professor's plane. The X-Men realize what happening and give chase, preventing them from reachin Xavier's plane so that he escapes safely even though empty 747 is destroyed instead. Then the villain behind t attack appears, a being calling himself Eric the Red, becomes evident that Havoc and Lorna are under ment domination, but that doesn't stop Scott from having to ta on Alex with the gloves off. Finally when Wolverine an Banshee arrive, Eric decides that they're outnumbered an he flees with Alex and Lorna, thus ending the battl Cyclops is in the perfect position to blast them and preve their escape, but he can't bring himself to do it. Wh Wolverine chews him out for it, Scott backhands him an tells the X-Man to shut up. Wolverine is about to ma Cyclops eat those words when Storm steps forward an tells Wolverine, "You will do nothing Wolverine—not no



not ever — or you will answer to me."

As Scott walks away, lost in his own torment, we see that this is all being watched on a viewscreen by Dr. Lang, but someone is in turn watching Dr. Lang on a viewscreen!

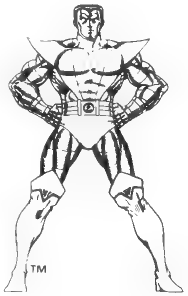
* * *

This is a very interesting story as it neatly connects three different plotlines, two of them brand new, none of them resolved and the third one just a hint of things to come. The opening sequence involves Xavier's extraterrestrial nightmares, then it moves to the mystery of Eric The Red and why he has dominated Havoc and Polaris to try to kill Xavier while the final panel reveals that the Sentinels will return, but who is spying on the man in the Sentinels command center?

The action sequences are well conceived and flow together well, particularly the part where a 747 is destroyed by Havoc as Xavier's aircraft just manages to escape above it.

Once again Cyclops finds himself in a quandry as this time he is forced to fight his brother or allow the assassination of Prof. X. His anger and frustration is evident when he strikes Wolverine, knowing full well that Wolverine has a short temper and is more than willing to take that anger out even against a fellow team mate. That Storm is capable of quieting Wolverine's raging anger reveals that there is more to the X-Man than his violent veneer would indicate.

The story in this issue has the best flow so far and indicates that Claremont was getting a good handle on the characters and was becoming more self-assured in the directions he wanted to take them.



X-Men #98 (April 1976) —
"Merry Christmas, X-Men...The Sentinels Have Returned!"

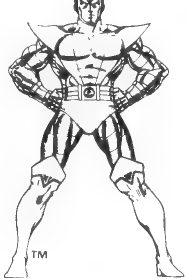
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Janice Cohen
Editor: Marv Wolfman

It's Christmas in New York, and a white Christmas to boot! The X-Men are in town visiting with Jean Grey before she and Scott go to dinner at the Rockefeller Plaza. While there the Sentinels appear, smashing through the roof to get to Jean and Scott. Jean is kidnapped but the Sentinels leave Scott for dead, believing that he was hurled from the building to his death. But Scott has grabbed on to a piece of wreckage, although there is no way he can make his way back to the building from where he's hanging. On the ground, Banshee, Storm and Wolverine see the wreckage of a Sentinel come crashing down and they go to the top of the building where they encounter still more. Banshee and Wolverine are captured while Storm rescues Scott. On the ground another Sentinel attacks them, but Storm uses her powers to create the power of a hurricane which is directed solely at that Sentinel.

Down in the Bahamas, where Prof. X is on a private fishing boat with a friend, a Sentinel attacks, catching Prof. X by surprise since his mental defenses should have prevented him from being detected. The boat is destroyed and Xavier is taken prisoner.

At Lang's base, Banshee, Wolverine, Jean Grey and Xavier are held prisoner. As Lang is raving, Jean Grey states, "You sad, pathetic, screwed-up little man — do you think the X-Men are that easily beaten?" Lang's angry "Yes!!" is punctuated by backhanding her across the face. An enraged Wolverine bursts his supposedly unbreakable bonds, revealing his claws. When a Sentinel attacks him, Wolverine destroys it. Upon freeing the others an argument develops over whether they should free Xavier and take him with them because they still have to fight their way out of the base, but the argument is terminated when another Sentinel attacks. They fight their way through Sentinel after Sentinel, only to burst through the final wall and find themselves in outer space!

At the same time an intruder at the school is revealed to be an old friend of the Professor's, one Dr. Peter Corbeau, the owner of the fishing boat who was temporarily masrooned at sea when the Sentinel destroyed the craft and kidnapped the Professor. It's Corbeau who figures out that the Sentinel's base must be in space. Now the X-Men know where to attack.



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This issue has a couple of amusing little bits in it such as the first two panels of page three in which Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (the original creative team on the original X-Men) see Scott and Jean kissing in public and remark, "Hey, Stan, you know who they were? I tell y', they never used to do that when we had the book." "Ah, Jack," Stan replies, "You know these young kids—they got no respect." It's a cute bit. Another, more subtle, one is the name of the fishing boat that Xavier is on. It's named the Dejah Thoris (after the heroine in Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter of Mars stories).

The Sentinels have always been the X-Men's most interesting and evocative foe. They had last been used when Roy Thomas and Neal Adams were the creative team on the book and because of their size and power they radiated real menace. A commonly used image in Sentinel stories shows one tearing off a roof to reach a mutant inside, just as page 3 of this issue does. One has to wonder though, with their size and power, just how many of them Dr. Lang managed to build since at least ten are destroyed in this one issue but more abound.

Since these are the new X-Men, not all of them are familiar with what the Sentinels are, such as on page 7, when Storm asks whether they are large, metallic robots since that's what she sees walking towards them.

While the artwork by Dave Cockrum is not as powerful as what Neal Adams did for the previous appearance of the Sentinels, the story by Chris Claremont is right up there with it, capturing all of the danger and urgency inherent in the threat of machines created to hunt down and capture mutants. The full potential of the Sentinels would finally be tapped and achieved in the "Days of Future Past" saga in **X-Men** some forty issues later.

X-Men #99 (June '76) —
"Deathstar Rising!"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Frank Chiara
Colorist: Michele Wolfman
Editor: Marv Woldman

Wolverine, Banshee and Jean Grey have crashed through the wall of the Sentinel base only to find that they were on a space platform orbiting the Earth. Facing imminent death, they are rescued by the Sentinels and recaptured.

Back on Earth, Cyclops and Dr. Corbeau figure out that the Sentinels must be based on SHIELD's orbital platform because the X-Men cannot be located anywhere on Earth. Dr. Corbeau helps the rest of the X-Men slip aboard the space shuttle as its crew, disguised by spacesuits. The ship blasts off, its supposed destination Starcore One but its real goal is the SHIELD platform.

On the other side of the world in the small village of Dal' Roon near Dublin, a man mails a letter to Sean Cassidy (aka Banshee), warning him of something that's happening at home. After sending the message he's killed by the man he was warning Banshee against, one Black Tom, who now awaits Banshee's coming.

And 1,347 miles above the earth, the shuttle approaches the SHIELD platform. When Lang detects mutants aboard it, the Sentinels attack, rupturing the hull and pulling Storm out through the opening. In order to escape the attack they ram the shuttle through the hull of the platform.

Storm, trapped outside the platform, is able to ride the solar wind and use her powers against the Sentinel which attacks her.

Inside, the other X-Men are battling Sentinels and during a lull in the battle Storm finds her way to them. Just then Jean mentally contacts Scott and reveals where she, Wolverine, Banshee and Xavier are being held prisoner.

When Lang realizes that the other X-Men are on their way, he prepares to kill Jean and the others but Cyclops blasts through the huge, vault-like door and attacks Lang. As Jean and the others are freed, they face a new menace — the old X-Men (including Cyclops and Marvel girl!) led by Prof. X — and they're attacking.

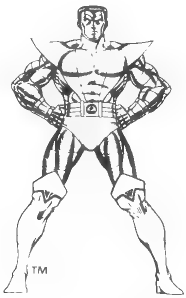
Another good chapter in the latest saga of the Sentinels. Page two is an interesting design in that it consists of ten panels, five on each side of the page, with one column showing the recapture of Banshee and the others in space while on the right Cyclops and Dr. Corbeau are searching for the other X-Men and finally arrive at the conclusion that they must be on the SHIELD orbiting platform.

Page three features a live newscast, anchored by Geraldo Jivera, about the mutant menace which is interrupted by a news bulletin about the launch of the space shuttle — a shuttle which no one else but those aboard knows contains a full compliment of mutants.

Aboard the shuttle we learn for the first time that Colossus once had an older brother, a cosmonaut, who burned to death in a launchpad explosion.

The setup for the confrontation with the old X-Men in the climax is well handled although it's obvious that something is very wrong since they include Cyclops (with his old visor style) and Marvel Girl, even though the real Cyclops lies wounded in the same room and Jean Grey is at his side.

Too often in comics the villian literally gets away with murder only to slip away at the end or be seemingly dispatched in a convenient explosion. But this time Scott grabs Lang, who was just about to murder Jean, and beats him up — works him over pretty well until he's struck down by a bast from the other "Cyclops."



X-Men #100 (Aug. 1976)

"Greater Love Hath No X-Man..."

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Colorist: Bonnie W.
Editor: Marv Wolfman

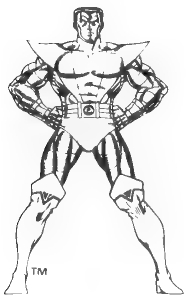
It's the new X-Men vs. the old aboard the SHIELD orbiting space platform which is being used by Dr. Lang as a base for the new generation of mutant-hunting Sentinels. But how can this be the old X-Men, which includes Cyclops and Marvel Girl, when both of them are also there with the new X-Men?

During the fight, each X-Man accuses the other of being an imposter, but these old X-Men, including Havoc, seem to possess all of the power that their real life versions possess. Could they actually be who they claim?

When Marvel Girl attacks Wolverine mentally, he bears up under it, stating, "I don't know from faces. I know from scents, voices...feelings...I also know Jean Grey. An' lady whatever you are — you ain't Jean Grey!!" He then leaps to the attack, claws fully extended, and eviscerates Marvel Girl. Momentarily shocked, the others expect to have seen a corpse, but instead they see a gutted robot — a new form of Sentinel.

Lang is furious — his X-Sentinels should have beaten the X-Men. Watching from their supposedly unbreakable tube prisons are Cyclops, Jean Grey, Dr. Corbeau and Xavier. Cyclops has regained his strength and bursts out, freeing the others as well.

Lang leaps into his small, one-man flying gunship and attacks the X-Men, but when Cyclops fights back the ship is deflected. Then Jean Grey mentally moves the controls by themselves and the craft hurls out of control, crashing into the huge viewscreen and exploding. The explosion causes a fire which the X-Men have to escape from in the shuttle. But the shuttle has a hole in it and all of their pressure suits were destroyed by the Sentinels. While Dr. Corbeau could fly the shuttle in, he wouldn't survive the radiation from a huge solar flare which they detected. But one of the X-Men could probably survive the radiation of the flare. Jean Grey uses her mental powers to read Corbeau's mind and gain his knowledge necessary to fly



the craft (since its on-board computer is also knocked out). Cyclops tries to stop her but Jean knocks him out with a mind blast. She then has the others get into the shielded Blackbird that's on the ship while she telekinetically seals the hole in the hull. She then uses the retrorockets to back out of the space platform and turns the ship towards the Earth, and right through the deadly solar flare.

* * *

This is when history gets a rewrite. When Chris Claremont wrote the Phoenix saga, this was the story of how Jean Grey acquired so much power that it altered and corrupted her. When Phoenix committed suicide, Jean Grey died, too. But then a couple years later Roger Stern and others figured out a way for Jean Grey to come back. The real Jean Grey. You see, she had never really become Phoenix — it was some entity from space which saved Jean Grey as she was dying upon piloting the shuttle through the solar flare and placed her body in an energized cocoon where she could slowly regenerate. While issue 100 ends with the shuttle entering the solar flare, the recent reprint of the issue in **Classic X-Men #8** added twelve pages written by Claremont and drawn by John Bolton showing the radiation destroying Jean until the entity appears and offers to help her. She agrees and it takes her form while she is placed in a cocoon to sustain and heal — a cocoon not found until the Fantastic Four uncover it long after Dark Phoenix is gone.

This issue shows the depth of friendship which exists between Jean Grey and Storm, and the sorrow Storm knows when she must leave her friend to what seems a certain death.

This is a pivotal issue in the chronology of the new X-Men as it marks the transition of Marvel Girl into what will become the Phoenix in issue 101.

X-Men #101 (Oct. '76) "Like A Phoenix, From the Ashes"

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Frank Chiaramonte
Colorist: B. Wilford
Editor: Archie Goodwin

The Starcore Space Shuttle comes screaming down out of the sky on a direct course for Kennedy Airport. An alert traffic controller clears a path for the craft which comes in for a landing, but not a soft one. It slams through all of the crash barriers and disappears into the waters of Jamaica Bay. Moments pass and the X-Men appear on the surface, having escaped from the wrecked shuttle. But what about Jean? Scott wants to go back for her and threatens anyone who tries to stop him, but before he can there's a disturbance in the water and Jean bursts out. But she's different. Her costume is radically altered and she calls herself Phoenix — and she is apparently unharmed by the rigors of passing through the radiation storm. But then she collapses and it's clear that she is injured.

They wade ashore and Xavier uses his mental powers to shield the presence of the X-Men from onlookers as they slip away and take Jean to the hospital.

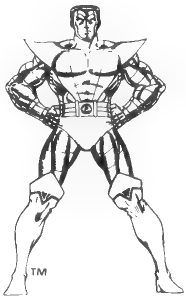
Wolverine buys a bouquet of flowers for Jean, but when he gets to the hospital he finds that the rest of the group are there waiting to see how she's doing as well. He didn't think of that, that her other friends would be there as well because he's never had friends like that.

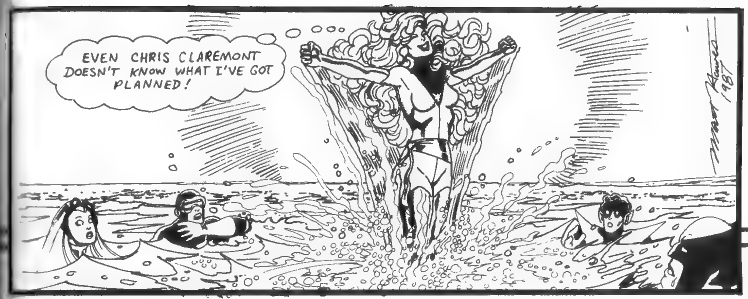
After waiting and waiting, the doctor finally comes out and says that she's going to be fine. Everyone is overjoyed. Scott is so overcome that he goes into a room by himself and cries out of relief. Because she needs a rest, Xavier states that he wants the rest of the X-Men to take a vacation while he and Scott remain behind. At first they resist, especially Wolverine, but finally they relent when Banshee reveals that he's just been notified that he's inherited a castle in Ireland, which will be a perfect place for them to go.

They travel to Ireland by plane and then to the castle by train and car. As they arrive, we see that someone is watching them from the castle. Whoever it is has someone with him he's holding hostage because of the "families" he has imprisoned. But when the man says he won't kill anyone, the man strikes him with his cane.

The X-Men arrive in the castle and are quite impressed, except for Storm who feels claustrophobic surrounded by the stone walls. As they take a look in one of the rooms they don't notice that there are small people watching from high atop a crossbeam.

In her room, Storm relaxes by bathing in a shower of he





own creation. Sometime later Nightcrawler bursts in and offers to accompany her to dinner. Using his image inducer, he demonstrates how he can come as Clark Gable, Fred Astair or even Groucho Marx. They settle on his usual Errol Flynn guise.

The X-Men gather in a group and walk towards the dining area when the floor suddenly drops away and hurls them into the dungeon. They arrive ready to fight and are confronted by Juggernaut and one Black Tom Cassidy, Banshee's cousin. As they prepare to face off, Storm is overcome by the claustrophobia of being in the dungeon and becomes hysterical.

* * * *

The birth of Phoenix, as least as it was originally done. **Classic X-Men** has been filling in the previously unknown facts about what **really** happened in the shuttle there on the edge of space.

The transformation of Jean Grey into Phoenix is an important facet of the development of the new X-Men because as nice a person as Jean Grey is, she was never that interesting a superhero as her powers were basically duplications of Xavier's. But now as Phoenix she became the most powerful member of the group. Too powerful as finally her power corrupted her, spoiling the cosmic beauty with cosmic disaster.

This issue deals with a facet which was never really explored very much down the line — Wolverine's infatuation with Jean Grey. It comes up again when he believes her to have been killed in Magneto's Antarctic base but then he develops a true romance of his own with Mariko, but that's down the road a piece.

Claremont continues to portray Cyclops as a man of emotional extremes. He was furious at being held back from helping Jean in the shuttle and after the crash he threatens to kill anyone who tries to stop him from going back to the wreck to rescue her. When the doctor announces that she's going to be all right, Scott breaks down and cries, so powerful are his feeling for her. Claremont has become a very deft writer when it comes to portraying emotional scenes. His recent work on **The Fantastic Four Vs. The X-Men** is some of the best writing ever featured for the FF.

X-Men #102 (Dec. '76) "Who Will Stop The Juggernaut?"

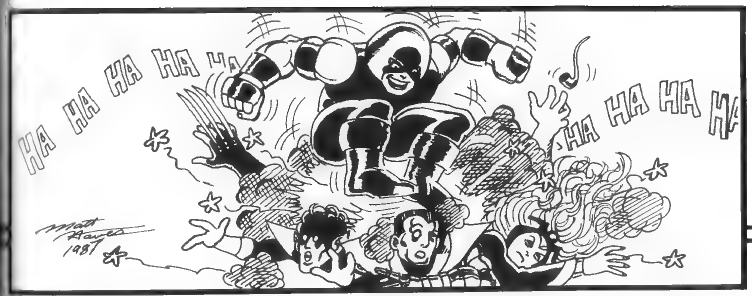
Writer: Claremont
Artist: Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Bonnie Wilford
Editor: Archie Goodwin

Confronted in the dungeon by Black Tom Cassidy and The Juggernaut, the X-Men are not really repared to go up against Xavier's step-brother, Cain Marko. Banshee takes on his cousin even though there is something about him which makes him immune to Sean's power.

Colossus is the only one who really has a chance against Juggernaut but even he is taking a beating. Nightcrawler tries a hit and run strategy which annoys the Juggernaut into following him, until he sees Storm. She is helpless in the grip of claustrophobia, made more intense by the memories it recalls of her parents when their house was destroyed when a plane crashed into it during a bombing run over Cairo, Egypt in 1956. Her parents were killed while she was barely able to crawl from the wreckage. Thereafter she lived in the streets and grew to adulthood until found by Xavier.

Xavier receives a mental image from Storm of her fear and of the face of Cain Marko. He asks Scott to come out of the hospital room so that he can tell him that the X-Men are in danger and that he must go to Ireland at once to assist them. Scott refuses because he wants to remain with Jean until he's sure she's out of danger. Xavier flies into a rage and is telling Scott what he thinks of his selfish response when he suddenly has another mental flash of contact with the person from his strange dreams, except that this time he believes he sees her in the mirror.

Back at the castle, Juggernaut knocks out Wolverine with a backhand swipe, but before he can deliver the killing blow, Nightcrawler hits him with a brazier of hot coals. Juggernaut is slightly hurt but very angry. Black Tom responds by hitting Nightcrawler with his own mutant power (which Banshee is also immune to) and knocks him



unconscious so that he falls aside in the shadows.

Banshee and Black Tom go at it again, in the process Tom boasts of how he and Juggernaut had been sprung from prison for a reason as they've been paid to kill the X-Men. Black Tom gets the upper hand and knocks out Banshee, but just then Colossus takes on Juggernaut again and he's angrier than ever. They really go at it, but finally The Juggernaut emerges triumphant.

Storm witnesses this and tries to reassemble her wits enough to attack, but Juggernaut just hurls her force bolt back at her, knocking her unconscious.

The X-Men have been defeated!

* * * *

Basically just a long fight scene. The interesting parts are the flashback origin of Storm and Scott's petulant arguing with Xavier. Here we never learn if Scott finally gave in to Xavier or not. That's reserved for next time.

Going through all these issues at once, it's plain how Claremont was slowly setting up the sequence of events which would climax in issues 107 & 108. All of the battles these last few issues have had the same underlying purpose (except for The Sentinels), that being a conspiracy to hire old enemies to destroy the X-Men before the person who is trying to reach Xavier can get to him.

X-Men #103 (Feb. '77) "The Fall Of The Tower"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: Janice Cohen
Editor: Archie Goodwin

In the castle known as Cassidy Keep, County Mayo, Ireland, The X-Men have been captured by Black Tom and The Juggernaut. But Nightcrawler is rescued by the Little People who live in the castle and they explain to him what has happened. While talking to them, Nightcrawler discovers he has an ability he was unaware of before — the power to become invisible when in shadow.

The X-Men (Colossus, Banshee, Storm and Wolverine) are being held prisoner in the laboratory, their powers neutralized, and Black Tom is planning to torture them. In this way they are sure to lure Xavier so as to spare his pupils the pain of the neuronic tangler glove.

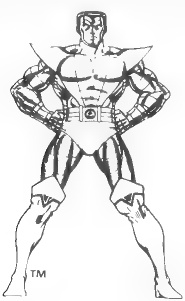
Just then there is a burst of smoke and a smell like fire and brimstone. It looks like Xavier in his wheelchair but it's actually Nightcrawler with the illusion creating the device he uses to walk around unnoticed in public. Cain Marko (Xavier's brother) is convinced and attacks. Xavier leaps from his wheelchair, dodging Marko and attacking Black Tom. When Xavier leaps to the walls and is able to stay there while crouching, Marko deduces that it must be Night crawler and strikes the wall near him so hard that he knocks a hole in it. This brings Storm out of the claustrophobia-induced trance she was in and in snapping out of it she immediately creates a hurricane which allows her to burst free and carry Colossus and Wolverine after her, although Marko is able to grab hold and restrain Banshee.

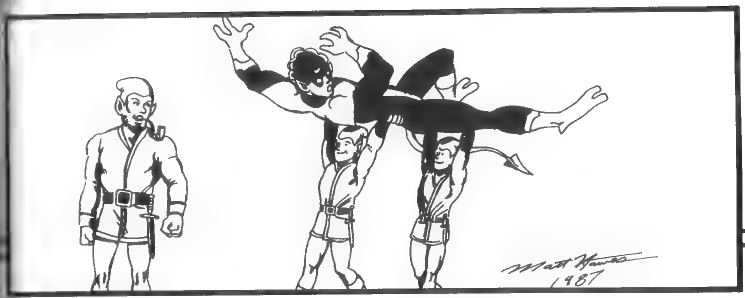
In the rubble Nightcrawler is slightly injured, but the Little People help him.

Marko and Black Tom carry Banshee up to the rook of the castle where they challenge the X-Men to come up and get him or watch them kill him in 5 minutes. Storm flies to the attack and Colossus hurls Wolverine to the top of the parapets. Colossus then starts climbing up the side himself.

Storm encounters energy blasters built into the castle's turret. She is barely able to dodge the deadly blasts while she whips up an Atlantic gale. While Marko hurls pieces of the battlements at her, Black Tom uses the battle computers to compensate for Storm's speed. Soon he'll have her in his sights.

While the foes are distracted by her, Nightcrawler sneaks up and frees Banshee, who then shatters the floor beneath the feet of the Juggernaut and sends him crashing down into the castle. Banshee then takes on his cousin, Black Tom, and since their powers cancel each other out,





they wind up battling with sword and axe. When Tom smashes Sean's axe, Banshee is able to twist himself so that Tom is hurled off the ledge and to the sea far below. Marko leaps after him, trying to save him as Tom was the only friend he ever had. They are swallowed up by the gale tossed surf and even after Storm banishes the winds, no trace is found of either man.

But the story doesn't end with the vanishing of Marko and Black Tom. We see Erik the Red communicating with someone on a viewscreen who is demanding that the X-Men be destroyed so that someone named Princess Neramani will be unable to contact them when she reaches Earth. Erik promises that the foe he's enlisted this time won't fail — a gentleman named Magneto.

* * *

This story reveals that Erik the Red is apparently a being from the stars who has been sent to Earth to attempt to destroy Xavier and the X-Men before someone reaches the Earth who is seeking their aid. The attempt is so desperate that Erik moves from one villain to another until he can find the one who will do the job.

More little character traits of X-Men are revealed, such as Storm's claustrophobia and her skill with a lockpick.

There's not much room for character development in this story as it deals with the X-Men breaking free from their captors and fighting back. Once again they had been secured with their powers neutralized, not unlike what they experienced when captured by Dr. Lang and the Sentinels.

One interesting facet has Colossus taking umbrage to Wolverine's description of Storm as a "Broad."

This story flows quickly and the action meshes very effectively with the characterization and is more satisfying than the usual superhero slugfest.

X-Men #104 (April 1977)
"The Gentleman's Name Is Magneto"

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
INker: Sam Grainger
Colorist: A. Yanchus
Editor: Archie Goodwin

Following the battle at Cassidy Keep, the X-Men make the mistake of showing up at their rented hovercraft in costume. The owner decides he wants nothing to do with them and refuses to honor the agreement to use the craft even though he was paid in advance. When the boat owner becomes more obnoxious about it, Colossus takes the man and hangs him up by his coat so that they can depart on the hovercraft in peace. But they don't head for the mainland. Moira MacTaggert is afraid that something is wrong on her island and so the X-Men go to investigate since it's not too far away. As they approach the island the hovercraft flies apart into hundreds of pieces and the X-Men have to swim ashore. They come up on a beach right before the laboratory, which is a towering edifice much larger than anything they imagined it would be. But when they try to approach it they are repelled by an invisible barrier. This barrier then traps them as a huge pice of the beach rips away and hurls them towards the labs outer wall. Only their combined powers enable them to crash through and save themselves.

Inside a nearby door starts to glow red-hot and then white-hot before it explodes to admit Magneto, who is vowing to slay all of the X-Men on the spot.

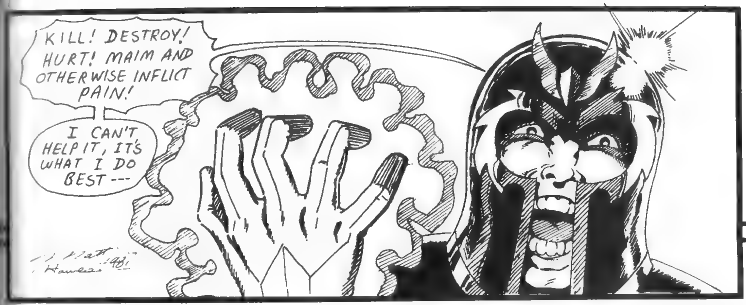
Outside on the landing pad, the X-Men's other aircraft lands bearing Moira and Cyclops. Scott is amazed by this Mutant Research Center as even Prof. X had never revealed its existence to him. The purpose of the secret facility is to house the most dangerous mutants and attempt to cure them of their hatred for mankind.

The mutant Jamie .Madrox had been in charge of guarding the lab and when they find him, slightly injured, he explains that he was attacked by Erik the Red, Havoc and Polaris and that Erik had freed Magneto. The master of magnetism had been reduced to the form of a baby, but a beam from a device of Erik's restores Magneto to adult size along with his memory. Humiliated, Magneto vows revenge.

Cyclops is horrified because the new X-Men have never fought Magneto and were never trained to because it was believed that his menace was ended. He races for the sounds of battle.

In the lab, Magneto hurls Wolverine aside by his claws and Colossus is a toy in the man's powerful magnetic grip, finally being hurled out to sea. Even Storm finds her lightning bolts hurled back at her by Magneto's powerful force field. And when Nightcrawler teleports out of the way, Magneto is able to analyze the disruptions in the Magnetic lines of force and deduce exactly where the X-Man will materialize, and attack him. Banshee is able to put up the biggest struggle and give Magneto a difficult time of it until he fuses the Magnetic particles in the air around Banshee's body, sealing him in what could become a skin-tight steel coffin.

But then Cyclops finds them and attacks, knocking Magneto off balance and stunning him, which enables Scott to free Banshee and the others. But he has decided that the real menace is not there, but in New York, and he orders a retreat, much to Wolverine's dismay. Colossus returns from the ocean and they all board the aircraft to fly back to New York where Cyclops has correctly figured out



that the real target is Prof. X.

In space, aboard a craft called The Starjammer, a man discusses with an alien the plan of an emperor about the opening of a dimensional gate which, if it comes to pass, would mean the end of everything.

In New York, Erik The Red, Havoc and Polaris are standing outside an apartment where Prof. X is visiting Jean Grey and her parents. Erik is waiting for the final player to make his entrance.

* * *

This story introduces Moira MacTaggert's Mutant Research Center wherein beings such as Unus the Untouchable and others are kept imprisoned to protect humanity from them while attempting to reform them. The laboratory is so huge that it looks more like a palace. The end of the story shows a door labeled "Mutant X" with a warning light, but that single panel introduces a plot which would not be explored in the X-Men for about twenty issues.

The reintroduction of Magneto in this story serves as a lead up to issue #111, which is probably the best single "old style" Magneto story ever done, being that it dates from the heyday of the Claremont/Byrne/Austin X-Men, which is what all the other issues tend to be measured against these days.

The Magneto in this story is still the two-dimensional villain as opposed to what would follow later (such as the more philosophical character as portrayed in the **X-Men** graphic novel). During his battle with the new X-Men, all Magneto talks about is how he's going to destroy them or whether they're a worthy opponent. A prime example is the first thing he says when he confronts the new X-Men: "Greetings, X-Men. I bid you welcome to the site of your final battleground. You are going to die here, mutants— and not all your powers nor your skills can save you from my wrath! Look on me, X-Men, for I am your oldest, deadliest foe, master of the legion of evil mutants — and not all your powers nor your skills can save you from my wrath! Look on me, X-Men, for I am your oldest, deadliest foe, master of the legion of evil mutants — and soon to b lord of all the world!" A far cry from the Magneto we know today. I guess when some people reform, they really reform!

This issue also continues the subplot begun with Erik The Red back in issue 97, but as the final panel indicates, it is leading up to the real explanation on those attacks. We also see the craft that Xavier dreamed about in issue 97 and the person who's piloting it. We also meet the leader of The Starjammers for the first time — a character who will soon play a major part in the series.

Like 103, this is basically another fight issue but once again a lot of interesting details are introduced in the background.

X-Men #105 (June 1977)
"Phoenix Unleashed"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Aritst: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Bob Layton
Colorist: Andy Yanchus
Editor: Archie Goodwin

The X-Men arrive at their headquarters in New York only to find that Erik The Red is already there. They attack him, not knowing that it was a setup. Erik had lured Firelord to Earth and convinced him that the X-Men were a worldwide threat, and the fact that they attack Erik on sight just seems to confirm his story. Then Firelord attacks the X-Men and knocks them unconscious.

Near Earth, the ship of the Princess Lilandra approaches and is attacked, but she is able to beam herself down to Earth where she materializes in Jean Grey's apartment right in front of Xavier.

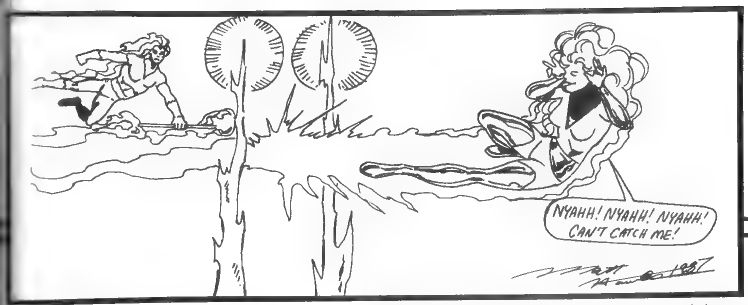
Xavier is at first startled because this is the person he has been seeing in his nightmares, but he soon gets control of himself and begins mindprobing her and learning her language and why she is there.

Erik directs Firelord to where Xavier is and when the former herald of Galactus attacks, Jean Grey/Phoenix fights back, revealing the true extent of her powers for the first time. The weakest X-Man has now become the strongest by far. She battles Firelord such he has never been battled before. But while Firelord has her engaged, Erik attacks Xavier and the others, stunning them. He carries Xavier and the Princess to the building's roof where he constructs a portable stargate. When the other X-Men arrive, Erik atacks and disables their craft. The X-Men escape and race to aid Prof. X and Erik is barely able to escape through the star gate and shut it off behind him.

Jean's parents have witnessed all of this and are rather shocked. They never knew about their daughter's involvement with the X-Men. They certainly were unaware of all of the powers she is displaying although Jean states that there's no time to explain. They have to follow Erik. While Xavier thinks they're helpless, Jean is easily able to use a small amount of her power to reactivate the star gate. The X-Men all pass through the activated gate, but Xavier remains behind Jean's parents. Where the X-Men are going, Xavier would not be able to help.

Just then Firelord shows up, hot to duke it out with Phoenix, and if he can't find her then he'll waste the planet.

Xavier replies, "then blast away, Firelord, for Phoenix is where you cannot reach her! You may destroy the Earth today, but if the X-Men fail — tomorrow the universe will die!"



The Erik The Red Saga is coming together now, although the aspect involving Havoc and Polaris was apparently resolved off stage inbetween issues as the freeing of them from Erik's control and the introduction of Firelord is not indicated as having taken place in some other title.

The alien spacecraft is of a very unique, insect-like design although the bridge of the craft is obviously patterned after the Enterprise, even though two different sections of it are shown. The doors are in the rear of the bridge and the viewscreen at the front overlooking a control console manned by two people. The revival years away, the longing for **Star Trek** was still quite strong in those days. Dave Cockrum later became the artist for a time on Marvel's **Star Trek** comic.

This issue begins the saga which truly reveals the extent of the powers of The Phoenix, as well as introducing the alien race which in issue 137 condemns the Phoenix to death. Although we only briefly glimpse them in this issue, the aliens of the Princess's race are an interesting and imaginative design as they are humans who nevertheless look alien because of their hairstyles, etc., while aliens such as Norrin Rad (who became the Silver Surfer) come from a planet where everyone dressed like alien yupples.

Once again the X-Men are in an aircraft which gets blown out of the sky from around them. Even Nightcrawler exclaims, "Not again!" Just one issue before they were in a hovercraft which was destroyed and flew apart around them. So far none have been injured by shrapnel or the sharp edges of flying metal. Just lucky, I guess. They'll need all their luck for what happens next.

X-Men #106 (August 1977)
"Dark Shroud Of The Past"
Writers: Chris Claremont & Bill Mantlo
Artists: Bob Brown & Dave Cockrum
Inker: Tom Sutton
Colorist: Andy Yanchus
Editor: Archie Goodwin

Firelord is demandng to know where Phoneix is and Xavier states that all of the X-Men have been transported by a stargate to a place where they are attempting to save the universe from destruction.

Xavier feels drained and mentally undone by Lilandra's departure and fears that the old nightmares are returning. He calls out for Moira MacTaggert and as he does, Xavier dreams of something which happened shortly after her arrival.

The X-Men are in the danger room and Wolverine has another threatening outburst in which he is ready to attack a team mate. Cyclops intervenes and while they are discussing the situation, and how they feel that Cyclops has been riding them rather hard since the death of Thunderbird, they suddenly discover that the Angel is in the room wit them. The Beast is there as well, along with Jean Grey an the Iceman. All are garbed in their old X-Men costumes an it's clear that these old X-Men don't think much of the ne ones and want them out. They begin to try to throw the out and a major fight ensues. Angel manages to get behin Cyclops and pull off Scott's visor, using the power against his fellow X-Men. But Scott gets away from Angel and turn his powers on him, convinced that this is an imposter. I fact, Scott's beam goes right through Angel, as though he isn't even there.

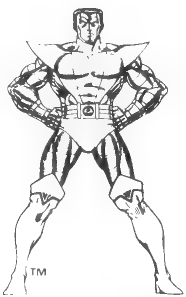
Just then Xavier crawls into the room and with an effo of will he makes the old X-Men vanish! They were menta images created by Xavier's dark side which he lost contro

[illegible] due to the effects of the strange nightmares. Dark Xavier appears (garbed all in green, including a cloak), but Prof. X is able to drive him off by attacking him with the mentally created images of the old X-Men.

Xavier now realizes that the nightmares he'd endured were from the forced rapport of two minds, strikingly similar but frighteningly alien. Xavier only hopes that the X-Men can overcome their new obstacles as well as Xavier just did his. * * *

Easily the worst issue of the new X-Men ever done. A painfully obvious fill-in issue sandwiched in at the worst possible time. Rather than running this after the Lilandra/Starjammers saga, it's stuck in the middle of it! So last issue the X-Men pass through the star gate and this issue we tune in to see what is happening and we get a poorly drawn, very silly story in which the new X-Men are once again fighting imitations of the old X-Men in a sequence very much like that in issue 100! What's worse, **X-Men** was bimonthly then so the reader wound up having to wait 4 months to see where the X-Men went through the star gate! With the brief intro drawn by Cockrum, and the closing panel making us wait until next issue to see what's going on, it all appears as though it was all very hastily thrown together at the last minute to deal with some deadline problem. It may explain why Dave Cockrum only drew two more issues at that time—#107 and then a fill-in with #110.

This issue has nothing to recommend it.



X-Men #107 (Oct. '77)
"Where No X-Man Has Gone Before"

Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: Dave Cockrum
Inker: Dan Green
Colorist: Andy Yanchus
Editor: Archie Goodwin

The X-Men emerge from the star gate onto an alien world and are confronted by a crowd of disparate beings. Just yards away they can see Princess Lilandra in the grip of Erik the Red.

When the X-Men state that they are there for the Princess, the beings state that she is being held as a traitor. But The X-Men have a job to do and that's to rescue the Princess. A fight ensues and The X-Men find themselves facing powers as fantastic as their own, including a being who can change his shape into that of terrifying alien monsters.

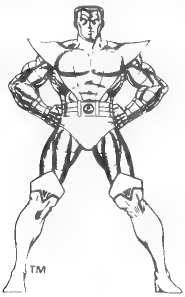
The Princess is chained to the crystal and a creature called the Soul-Drinker is summoned to take the Princess to a death worse than death. The Nightcrawler teleports to her side, yanks out the chains and, in desperation, teleports away with her — the first time he had ever tried that with a passenger. He barely makes it.

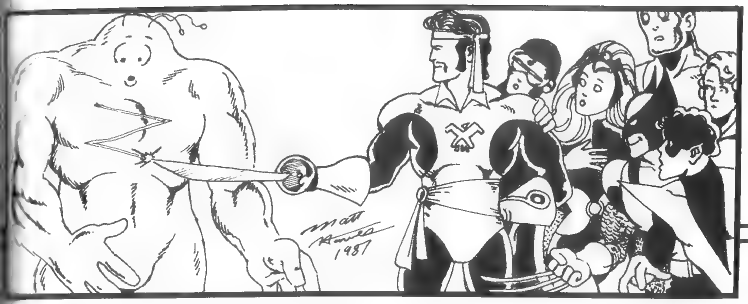
Safe with the X-Men, Lilandra explains that when her brother, D'Ken, discovered the existence of an ancient force, the deadliest weapon in the universe, which he meant to have for himself. When she opposed him, she was arrested and framed in a coup attempt. She escaped during a revolt and that was when her mind came into contact with Xavier's. She was able to do this during the burst of powe that occurred during the mental battle with X'Nox (issue 65 But D-Ken's telepathic spies also detected this and sense her plan. An agent on Earth, Davan Shakari, wa contacted and he took on the identity of Erik the Red in hi efforts to destroy Xavier and the X-Men before Lilandr could reach them to seek their aid.

When The Galdiator and others attempt to recapture th Princess while the X-Men are still engaged in battle, she i saved by Corsair and the Starjammers, who side with the X men.

D'Ken is waiting for a gateway (which opens once every million years) to open so that the power behind it will b absorbed the huge M'Kraan crystal. As the power grows in the gem it builds until it cannot hold anymore, and it explodes. Then all existence across the universe momentarily blinks. On Earth they feel it and realize that i those cosmic blinks keep up or get worse, that all of reality will end as the fabric of space will tear itself apart.

* * *





This one issue introduces more new characters than you can keep up with. There's the Imperial Guard of the Emperor D'Ken, who are basically ringers for the Legion of Super Heroes, done as an homage to this book which Cockrum once drew.

This issue also introduces the Starjammers, a group of spacefaring swashbucklers led by Corsair (whose identity we get hints at here and who's revealed in #108 to be Scott Summer's father). Raza, Hepzibah and Ch'od comprise the rest of the Starjammers as seen here.

This story lived up to the four month wait that fans were put through as it throws even more at us than we could have expected as all of the aliens we meet are very different and the confrontation is seen from the X-Men's point of view as well as from Earth's as we check in there when the M'Kraan first goes "blink." I can't say I'd ever seen "blink" used as a sound effect before, but Dave Cockrum uses it here and John Byrne repeats it in 108.

This encounter is far more interesting than anything that led up to it, certainly more interesting than encounters with boring characters like Firelord who seems like little more than a cosmic version of the Human Torch. Using Cosmic characters tends to have the reverse effect from what most writers think it does as the character becomes so powerful as to be beyond recognition. Phoenix is possibly the only time such a character was handled well because we always understood the position she was in. She began as a human and then was recreated and began growing stronger, particularly after issue 108. She always had identifiable human characteristics.

A turning point in the new X-Men can be seen here as Claremont seems to be striving beyond the ordinary superhero fisticuffs into the realm of more complicated science fiction tales (which Claremont proved again that he could handle in **Marvel Preview** #11—1977, with "Starlord"). This is a strong lead-in to an even stronger conclusion.

X-Men #108 (Dec. '77)
"Armageddon Now!"
Writer: Claremont
Artist: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: A. Yanchus
Editor: Goodwin

The X-Men are on an alien planet known only as The World. Using something called a M'Kraan Crystal, D'Ken is attempting to use the power exposed by the opening of a dimensional gate.

On Earth the effects are felt but no one knows from where they originate. Even The Avengers and The Fantastic Four are helpless to intervene. The planet they have helped to preserve so many times is just as vulnerable as the rest of the universe.

Back on The World, a guardian of the M'Kraan Crystal appears — an imp who is supremely powerful. When Wolverine attacks him, the imp knocks Wolverine off the planet where he has to be rescued by the orbiting ship of the Starjammers. Phoenix attacks the imp by pulling a meteor down out of space and smashing it. The imp emerges unscathed. Cyclops has Storm create a cyclone so that the X-Men can retreat and regroup.

But Banshee has a plan of his own. Something that the imp said about programming has led him to believe that it's a robot. He moves in to release a scream but the imp attacks. Banshee is barely able to get out a piercing, narrow beam scream which destroys the robot imp.

In response an even larger robot guardian appears, one a thousand times more powerful than the imp. The X-Men dodge it while Raza of The Starjammers grabs up Emperor D'Ken and hurls him at the pulsing crystal. There is a flash and suddenly the X-Men, Starjammers and D'ken are in what appears to be a city, but which Phoenix correctly identifies as being inside the M'Kraan Crystal. As she approaches what she calls the heart of the crystal, her hand begins to dematerialize and beams shoot out penetrating deep into the psyches of everyone there, summoning up their worst nightmares that they must individually fight off.

Jean manages to pass into the heart of the sphere and learns how to undo what D'Ken has begun, but she needs an anchor in reality or she'll be lost. Storm offers that anchor. Jean asks Corsair to help and when he asks why he should, Phoenix replies that he should because she knows that he's Major Summers, and that Scott, Cyclops, is his son.

Inside the heart of the crystal is a neutron galaxy which, if released, would destroy the universe in an implosion leading to a new big bang. She is able to repair the energy lattice there so that it cannot be broken and then the X-Men escape, passing back through the star gate to the rooftop in New York.

Lilandra returns and the gate disintegrates behind her. Her brother, D'Ken, was driven insane by what occurred inside the crystal. Lilandra has chosen to return to Xavier

because she loves him and because she is still considered an outlaw, although she believes that will change.

Firelord knows the truth now and harbors no anger towards the X-Men. Lilandra is exiled on earth, but with the man she loves. Peace has been brought to the galaxy and Earth doesn't know that it owes its existence to the X-Men.

* * *

While issue 107 marked Dave Cockrum's finest work ever to appear on the X-Men, John Byrne's debut on issue 108 is even better. What's especially impressive is that there's a lot of fineline inking by Terry Austin and it all reproduces exceedingly well. These days the reproducton on the average comic book (not the higher quality packages like Epic Comics) is so poor that fine line inking is ruined in most comics. Even the gradations of color used are superior to what you generally see today. Take page 16, panel 2. There's a lot of subtle inking on Jean's face as well as a careful blending of colors. Why don't we see that today? All through the issue there are examples like this. It's the superior reproduction of the art which enables the writer's intent to be carried out to its fullest possible effect.

Here we learn for sure that Corsair is Scott Summer's father, but not how it all ties in. It will be awhile before we find out any more about the Starjammers. Certainly Scott doesn't know that he'd just met his father on a world light years away from Earth.

This is an extremely satisfying story. When I first read this several years ago, it impressed me as the best comic book story I'd read in years. I was surprised when Claremont continued to not only equal this level, but often surpass it. Issues 94-106 seemed to be Claremont trying to find himself and establish the characters in his mind and in the readers. Once they'd finally become full blown then the plots started to dominate and became complex stories in which these now established characters appear. Turning boring Marvel Girl into exciting Phoenix was his last step in turning the new X-Men into a cohesive entity. Interestingly, he had cast out Jean Grey in issue 94, but after she turned up in issue 98 during a get-together in New York, she stuck with them and her decision to find a life apart from the X-Men was lost in the shuffle of Sentinels, particularly when it was the trip back from space which brought about the Phoenix interchange.

So now Claremont had the new X-Men firmly in place, and it was time to forge ahead.

X-Men #109 (Feb. '78)
"Home Are The Heroes!"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artist: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: A. Yanchus
Editor: Archie Goodwin

The X-Men are returning to the mansion after their successful mission through the star gate to rescue Lilandra and defeat her brother's mad plans. Accompany them to the house are Jean Grey's parents, who only just learned of their daughter's transformation into Phoenix.

Banshee is ecstatic to see Moira again and Storm is so happy to be back in her attic loft with her plants that she creates a rain storm for them and baths in the shower nude.

While Kurt (Nightcrawler) makes a date for the evening, Peter (Colossus) is invited on a picnic with Banshee.

Scott watches as Jean goes outside with her parents and explains the Phoenix side of her nature. Alone, he wonders about his relationship with Jean because she seemed so different since she became Phoenix.

Wolverine tags along on the picnic because he wants to get in some hunting. When Storm takes offense at the slaughter of small animals, Wolverine snaps back that he said he was going to hunt, not kill. His idea of hunting is to be able to sneak up on an animal and just touch it. When Storm apologizes and states that she misjudged him, He sharply replies, "I could care less, 'roro. You've all been misjudgin' me since the day I joined this turkey outfit!"

Meanwhile, someone nearby has someone in the mansion under surveillance.

When Wolverine is in the woods, slowly sneaking up on a deer, something spooks it. Something which soon attacks Wolverine and calls itself Weapon Alpha. This is someone named James MacDonald Hudson who is wearing a battle suit which enables him to take on Wolverine. He's been sent by the Canadian government to bring Logan back because they do not accept his resignation after spending so much money on training and enhancing him.

The battle brings Wolverine and Weapon Alpha within sight of the nearby X-Men who had been relaxing up until that moment. When Wolverine is knocked out, Colossus steps in and knocks the attacker through a tree. And when he picks up that tree to attack with, Storm destroys the tree with a lightning bolt. When Weapon Alpha fires a zap of his own, it is deflected from the metal skin of Colossus and grazes Moira, injuring her. She falls into the small lake

from which Banshee quickly rescues her. But he is so enraged that he attacks Weapon Alpha full force, causing him to flee, knowing that his mission has failed.

Wolverine explains that what they'd just witnessed is the beginning, and that the worst is yet to come.

* * *

This introduced the character who would become known as The Vindicator in **X-Men** #120. From these beginnings came Alpha Flight, the group co-created by John Byrne and whose adventures he would choose to chronicle instead of rendering the X-Men.

The personal interludes in this issue are very good as some loose ends are tied up. Phoenix has a heart to heart with her parents (although we don't hear what she says). Interestingly, we see it at a distance as Scott does, as she is talking to her parents and then suddenly transforms into Phoenix. We see Ororo showering in the nude among her plants and later a conversation with Peter reveals that she likes to swim this way as well, and only reluctantly wears a swimming suit on orders from Xavier.

Banshee's developing relationship with Moira is nice to see as most comic book romances tend to be like walking through a mine field. It's perhaps for this reason that when he loses his powers in the issues to come and master control room and begins sabotaging the out on the short end of the deal. The X-Men can't claim to harbor a lot of happy relationships. Even Havoc and Polaris had to leave the group in order to be happy together. And yet these are carefree days indeed compared to what would come. Besides the already mentioned problem awaiting Banshee, Storm would eventually undergo a personality crisis and then lose her powers while Jean Grye would die (or so it was intended). Xavier winds up having to leave Earth entirely in order to be happy with the Princess Lilandra.

The X-Men just didn't know when they had it good.

X-Men #110 (April '78)
"The X-Sanction"
Writer: Chris Claremont
Artists: Tony DeZuniga & Dave Cockrum
Colorist: A. Yanchus
Editor: A Goodwin

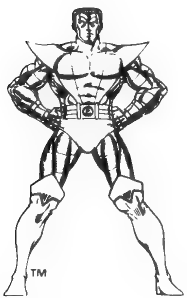
While the X-Men are playing a game of baseball behind the mansion, a telephone repair truck arrives out front and as Moira MacTaggert leads the repairman in he pulls a gun and shoots her with a tranquilizing dart. He then enters the master control room and begins to sabotage the delicate mechanisms, under the mental domination of a barely perceived face.

As The X-Men re-enter the house, Cyclops informs them that they're due for a training session in the danger room.

Meanwhile Jean and Xavier go upstairs and are surprised by the intruder, who calls himself Warhawk. He shoots them both with the tranquilizer gun before they can attack him, and in fact has to shoot Jean twice because she struggles to fight off the effects. But she manages to send a mental cry of help to Cyclops, although the door to the Danger Room locks before he can respond.

The Danger Room then begins to atack them with all of its defense mechanisms shut down so that the safety locks are inoperative. When Scott tries the automatic shutoff, it fails to respond. Finally he has Nightcrawler carry Wolverine and teleport outside the room. The rigors of the teleportation cause both of them to pass out. So while they are safe, they're unable to help their teammates inside, the battle with the Danger Room continues.

Finally Wolverine regains consciousness and destroys the control panel. But then he's attacked from behind by Warhawk. Warhawk's body is as hard as steel—not unlike that of Colossus. But Wolverine keeps attacking him until finally the rest of the X-Men crash out of the Danger Room and Warhawk realizes that he's outnumbered, in spite of his invulnerability. When he goes to use a gas bomb from his belt, he finds that Nightcrawler has already appropriated it.



Colossus then decks Warhawk.

When the police arrive they wonder how the Professor and his students were able to overcome such a dangerous person.

After the police leave, Jean states that she's decided to remain with the X-Men after all. She is also concerned why her powers failed her just when she needed them the most.

* * *

One can assume that Xavier used his mental powers on Warhawk to keep him from telling the police that the school is just a front for The X-Men.

An obvious fill-in issue in which the X-Men once more have a battle in the Danger Room. The last time was in #106 when they were attacked in the Danger Room by mental doubles of the old X-Men. Still, this one is a lot better than 106, and at least it fits into the continuity and isn't a "flashback."

Considering that Moira MacTaggert runs an institution for dangerous mutants, one would think that (A) She would have been more cautious around the "repair man" and (B) That Warhawk would have been taken there instead of by the police. After all, how could the police contain someone like Warhawk?

The baseball game at the opening of the story seems to serve just to point out that Wolveirne still feels very much the loner and considers a game to be just as serious as a battle.

X-MEN VS. X-MEN

Looking back from the perspective of 1987, which
turning into another year of the X-Men (what with **X-Men V**
Avengers and **FF Vs. X-Men**), it's hard to realize that the X-M
did not dominate the comic book marketplace of t
Sixties the way that they have the Seventies and Eighties

The original X-Men were Marvel's third team of heroes
be introduced (following the Fantastic Four, who appeare
two years earlier in 1961, and The Avengers, who appeare
the same month as the X-Men). Unlike the Avengers, wh
were comprised of characters already established
Marvel Cmics, the X-Men were launched new on the scen
In this way they were similar to the Fantastic Four. Whe
the FF comic premiered, it also marked the **fi**
appearance of those characters. They were strange, ne
and different and garnered attention for that reason. Th
X-Men had the same effect.

But following within two years of the Fantastic Four, th
X-Men began almost as Marvel's own imitation of the
highly successful team book. While the FF had Ree
Richards as the elder statesman and leader of the grou
the X-Men had Prof. X. While the FF had the powerful, wis
cracking Thing, The X-Men had The Beast. While the F
had the fiery Human Torch, the X-Men had an equally ho
tempered teenager, but he was the opposite of the Hum
Torch; the direct opposite, in fact. He was called Icema
The FF had only one female character, as did the X-Me
Luckily the X-Men's roster was larger and filled out wit
characters not patterned after the FF, such as Scott Summer
and Warren Worthington III. But the team still had the
unfortunate parallel. Even Lee and Kirby began to realiz
that they needed to depart from the mold and so within
couple issues The Beast was suddenly spoutin
polysyllabic words instead of gruff remarks and wis
cracks.

Even Prof. X had to learn his place in the scheme o
things when in an early issue he thinks in passing of hi
unstated feelings for Jean Grey, a plot thread which wa
quickly abandoned in favor of the long suffering Sco
Summer's infatuation with Jean.

Unlike the New X-Men whose ages run the gamut fro
Kitty Pryde's adolescence to Wolverine's adulthood, th
original X-Men were all supposed to be in their teens an
Xavier's school for Gifted Children is where they studie
It's just that this school has a few extra courses, such a
sharpening mutant powers to a razor's edge and how t
beat up the bad guys.

Like the Fantastic Four, the original X-Men (just as the New Mutants today) are a surrogate family with Xavier as the father figure. Also like the Fantastic Four, the leader has his opposite. While Reed Richards' eternal nemesis is Dr. Doom, Xavier's opposite number is (or was for an awfully long time) Magneto. Magneto even bore more than a passing resemblance to Dr. Doom, what with the armor and all. And with Jack Kirby drawing both of them in the early days, they both had an air of regal, self-satisfied arrogance. They both had complex plans of world conquest, too. The early issues of the X-Men (5 of the first 7 issues) even had Magneto tirelessly returning to tax the X-Men and hopefully overcome them before they could recover from his last deadly foray.

Magneto is a perfect example of the difference between the new and old X-Men. Even under the deft handling of Roy Thomas in **X-Men** #63, Magneto was still an arch villain. This approach was followed by Claremont in issues 104, 111 and 113, but in 150 and in the X-Men graphic novel, Magneto emerges as a more complex character. He **believes** in his crusade against humanity because he is of a persecuted minority. Magneto survived the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps but the rest of his family did not. This fueled a lifetime of hatred against humanity and its prejudices. Looking back at, say, X-Men #4, the Magneto we see there espouses a self-serving philosophy which is no more complicated or caring than that used by The Mandarin or Paste-Pot-Pete — he's just better at instituting his plans and finding people to carry them out.

I have always been fascinated by the seldom employed story concept of the villain changing his mind in order to aid the hero in a common goal. One of the few times it was done in the Sixties, and the first time I ever encountered it, was in Flash #124 (Nov. 1961), which coincidentally came out about the same time as the first issue of **The Fantastic Four**. In it Captain Boomerang teams up with The Flash and The Elongated Man against alien invaders. Seeing Capt. Boomerang use his skills towards accomplishing a positive goal was a thrill far in excess of seeing The Flash escape from the Capt.'s giant boomerang trap at the end of the story when he reverts to his old ways after driving the aliens off. That story touched on a very exciting idea that no one realized the inherent potential of for years. DC certainly never went after the concept again. But Marvel would use it from time to time such as when Dr. Doom was asked to team up with the FF by Sue Storm to battle a common menace. Once again this captured an almost indefinable sense of grandeur from seeing an unapologetic villain choose to rise to the occasion and do something honorable, even at the risk of his own life. Archie Goodwin's script captured this exceedingly well, especially since this was during the turbulent months immediately following Kirby's departure from Marvel.

Looking over the 66 issues of the old X-Men (which ceased, other than as reprints, as 1970 began) and the over twice that many issues of the new X-Men since 1975 shows that the difference in the success of the two teams under one title could very well be tied simply to the creative teams on the book. This is not to necessarily say that Chris Claremont is better now than Stan Lee was twenty years ago, but rather that Claremont has given the new X-Men an advantage that the old ones never had — a consistent creative voice. In 66 issues, the old X-Men had four different writers: Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, Gary Friedrich and Arnold Drake. Whenever a new writer comes on a book, they tend to have their own ideas about how the stories should be told and the directions things should go. This tends to create some havoc, which at times can be good. In the case of the old X-Men it wasn't. The vision of mutants versus mankind originated by Lee and Kirby and carried on by Roy Thomas became diluted under subsequent writers who basically were just telling standard superhero stories starring the X-Men. Only when Thomas returned in issue #55 did he bring the important underlying themes of the X-Men back to the forefront. But it was apparently too late, even with artwork on several of those issues by Neal Adams. But it has also been opined that the more complicated artwork of Adams may have put off comic readers more accustomed to the simple, straightforward graphics found in most comics of the day. At any rate, the X-men went into hibernation for nine months and instead of producing a new child the title gave birth to years of reprints.

When the new X-Men were in the offing the title gave pause for four months so that **Giant Size X-Men** #1 could appear, followed two months later by **X-Men** #94 which marked the first non-reprint issue of the title in more than five years. It also features most of the old X-Men deciding that it's time to move on, not just because they want to get

on with their own lives outside of fighting monstrous, earth-threatening menaces, but also because they just don't get along well with the new guys.

This issue itself points up the differences between the old and new X-Men. The original team was comprised of largely young, socially conscious males (Yuppies!) who knew the right circles to travel in but found those eyebeams, wings and big feet such a darned inconvenience. Even Xavier's school is so preppie looking and safe, and in such a nice neighborhood, that the students' parents felt perfectly safe leaving their youngsters in Xavier's expert care. While Warren Worthington III is the most extreme example of this, no on around him felt that he was particularly out of their league.

What Xavier's school is and always has been is a small community. While the old X-Men were shown to have some sort of outside lives (as in dating), the group identified more closely with one another. Their lives and interests were very similar and they socialized together more often than not, even when dating. These people got along with each other and the only spats were the inevitable ones over women. Jean Grey, of course, was the first one to arouse interest in her male compatriots but similar rivalries erupted when Lorna Dane (Polaris) came along. Interestingly, in spite of their daily contact, Scott Summers and Jean Grey never really voiced their mutual love until years after the series began. Seeing them together and happy at last, instead of the constant mental hand-wringing, helped to make those last few issues of the original team more satisfying. After a couple dozen issues of, "If only I dared say what I really felt...", the annoyance quotient grows exponentially.

The new X-Men have thus had a persistence of vision which the old team wasn't fortunate enough to have, and which in fact virtually no comic book has ever had to this extent. For almost twelve years and over 120 issues (plus annuals and specials), the new **X-Men** has been written by Chris Claremont and Chris Claremont and Chris Claremont!—since 1975 when he guided the new team through its early, adjustment days which included an X-Man dying for the first time (#95). While Xavier had "Died" in issue #43, it was later revealed in #65 to have been one of those comic book "Deaths" which is conveniently revised at the stroke of a writer's pen. It created a precedent on the X-Men that Chris Claremont chose to avoid, which is why he had never intended Jean Grey to return from the dead, no matter how clever the explanation.

The new X-Men differ sharply from the original team in that none of them — Nightcrawler, Colossus, Wolverine, Storm — are exactly from well-to-do backgrounds. In fact the characters are German, Russian, Canadian and Africa and had been forced to eke out an existence on the fringe of society until Xavier invited them to join him in America. Initially it was to help him rescue the original X-Men, but when that group showed its gratitude by packing up and hitting the road, with the exception of Scott, Xavier found himself with an entirely new group of students, and Scott as the graduate on hand to show the new guys the ropes.

Scott's reason for staying underlines the school as society motif because Cyclops has no life outside the X-Men. Due to his eye beams (which can only be controlled by special glasses), he can never comfortably move around among normal people, any more than Nightcrawler can. Their very talents forces them to withdraw from a society which greets the different with suspicion. Interestingly, when The Beast was still blue and furry, his bizarre characteristics actually made him popular! He was always portrayed as being very attractive to women and a regular party animal. Actually, in a Marvel universe populated by so many bizarre costumed characters that you need an encyclopedia to keep track of them all, I suspect that the shock quotient of society would have been worn down a long time ago and that people would be more fascinated than repelled by the skilled human oddities in their midst.

While the old X-Men remained pretty much the same throughout the Sixties, the new X-Men have been changing from the start. In less than the first 10 issues, a new X-Man had died and Jean Grey had been transformed from Marvel Girl, the dullest X-Man, into Phoenix, one of the most interesting. Over the years change has continued as Kitty Pryde was added, she and Colossus almost had an affair, Storm lost her powers but was still able to defeat Cyclops in a contest of skills as well as undergoing personality changes of her own. And we saw Phoenix die. Scott then quickly found a Jean Grey lookalike and married her while Magneto reformed and came to take the place of Xavier at the school when he was whisked off to space to save his life. Xavier even got the use of his legs back while finding romance with the interstellar princess Lilandra. And the most recently the Mutant Massacre led to the addition of new members to the group, so if there's anything that the

new X-Men is not, it's static. Things are always happening and there isn't time for readers to get bored with sameness, of which the old X-Men tended to have a lot of.

Oddly enough, it's possible to compare the old and new X-Men concurrently as the old team is appearing under the name **X-Factor** and so far are more popular than ever. But they're out on their own now and are really quite different than they were in the old days.

And so the Eighties have become the era of the mutants in which the X-Men appear in their own title as well as frequent mini-series whenever someone comes up with a commercial notion. The best ones are written by Claremont, though, who seems to understand the characters bettter than anyone else, and even understands the characters in other books better than their own writers. This is in evidence in **X-Men vs. The Fantastic Four** in which Claremont has written the best Fantastic For story done by anyone in years, including the fine run done by John Byrne. Claremont made the FF really come alive in that series so that now the sorry state of the monthly FF book is even more apparent.

But dozens of reasons can be trotted out and lined up as to why the new X-Men sell the way the old X-Men never did. The fact remains that the book is very different and the comic book readers of today (95% of whom weren't buying comics 20 years ago) are just more in tune with the approach to the series taken by Claremont and the artists who put images to the author's words.

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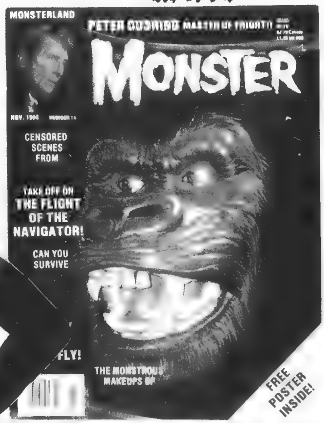

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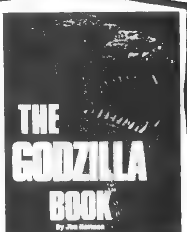

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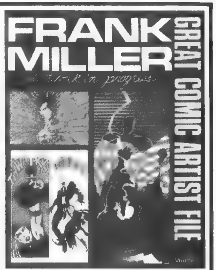

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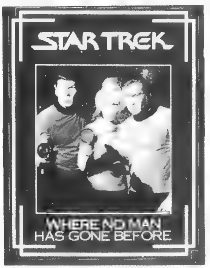

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1976 marked an important new turning point in the history of Marvel Comics. The first era of the X-Men had run its course a few years before and the title had only existed as reprints for several years. But rather than just bring the same characters back in new stories, it was decided to recraft and remold the group for the Seventies. In place of the old X-Men was a new, cosmopolitan group with members from Europe, Africa, Russia and Canada. They still worked out of the same School For Gifted Youngsters but now they brought cultural differences along with their widely varying backgrounds. While Len Wein was the actual creative force behind this reshaping, Chris Claremont had some input as well and began scripting the new X-Men with their first regular issue. The fact that he has remained the author on the title to this day explains how the series has maintained its credibility and its edge and why it hasn't wandered off into meaningless sidebars such as often plagued the original title with its shifting creative teams.

In this volume of CRITIC'S CHOICE, we look at the X-MEN and see how Claremont built the background of the new team from the inside out, slowly bringing personal histories to the surface while at the same time sending the X-Men on adventures across oceans and across the universe. In these early issues we see an X-Man die and another be reborn in an amazing new way. These first eighteen issues also saw the first appearance on the title of John Byrne, an artist whose contributions both graphically and as a co-plotter would help to establish the new X-Men as Marvel's most popular title. Not bad for a book which had just a few months before existed in the limbo land of seemingly endless reprints!

So return with us now to the time when it all began and see the origins of what would come to be called the Mutant Revolution. . .

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